

Nixon Aides Said To Quash My Lai Data

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— Aides of former President Nixon suppressed the Army's secret report on the My Lai massacre for several years despite public statements to the contrary, it has been learned.

The decision against release of the controversial 1970 report was made by White House officials, overruling private recommendations by the Army that it be released, according to military sources in Washington.

Several sources, including the author of the report, retired Lt. Gen. William R. Peers, now say an expected new plea to President Ford may result in release of the four-volume Peers report.

The document is the result of an Army investigation, headed by Peers, into the initial cover-up of the 1968 massacre by U.S. troops in South Vietnam. That probe led to charges against 14 officers, none of whom was convicted. The only man convicted was Lt. William Calley, the My Lai platoon leader, who was charged on the basis of another investigation.

For years, the Army has maintained that the decision on releasing the report has rested solely with three suc-

cessive Secretaries of the Army.

High Army officials now admit privately that the White House was secretly calling the shots all along. They say those responsible were former chief domestic affairs adviser John D. Ehrlichman, former presidential counsel John W. Dean III and his successor, J. Fred Buzhardt, a former Defense Department general counsel. None of these former aides would respond to inquiries.

Pentagon sources suggest that the former White House aides did not want the report released because they feared it would revive the bitter My Lai controversy.

The Army also has not wanted portions dealing with unproved charges against some officers released but top officials are known to favor release of the remainder, including the report's basic findings.

Official spokesmen at the White House, Defense Department and the Department of the Army have repeatedly denied any White House involvement in suppressing the Peers report.

A spokesman for Army Secretary Howard H. (Bo) Callaway said this week that the secretary would have no comment and would not repeat his earlier statement that the decision was his.

But one army official, W. J. (Bill) Donohoe, a consultant to the chief of information, acknowledged that such reports are "exactly right . . . quite accurate."

Peers, reached at his home in Kentfield, Calif., said he learned the White House had ordered suppression of the report from Bland West, a retired colonel who was his deputy during the inquiry and who is now an assistant general counsel for the Army. West has been unresponsive to inquiries.

Peers also said "there are indications" that an expected request by Callaway to the new administration may prompt release of the report. Peers himself was denied access to the report last year.